THE MINISTER FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI S.R. BOMMAI): (a) No, Sir.

(b) The Days of Indian Culture were held in Russia from 16th to 28th September, 1996. This was a cultural manifestation much smaller in scale and range than a Festival of India. So it cannot be compared with the Festival of India organised abroad in Russia and elsewhere.

The size and the duration of the show notwithstanding, the importance accorded to it by the Russian side may be gauged from the fact that the Russian Prime Minister, Mr. Chernomyrdin was present in the inauguration and also brought with him a message from President Yeltsin. According to the available reports, since the emergence of the Russian Federation, there has not been a representation at Prime Ministerial level at any cultural event in Moscow organised by another country. This was also the first time that the local costs of such a festival were covered by the Russian Government and that the components of the Indian contingent went to 9 other cities spread across Russia, including Siberia, besides Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The reaction of the audience was enthusiastic. There were full houses for the inaugural and the closing ceremonies and there was a large turn-out for various events organised during the Days. In St. Petersburg, the cultural events were welcomed by packed houses.

On the whole, the Days of Indian Culture in Russia became a major manifestation of friendship and mutual understanding between the two countries.

Conservation of Forests Wild life and Environment in North East

2229. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the schemes being taken up by Government for conservation of forests, wildlife and environment in the North-Eastern States during the last three years, State-wise;

(b) the amount provided for this purpose during the said period, project-wise; and

(c) the achievements made under each project during the said period, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (CAPT. JAI NARAIN PRASAD NISHAD): (a) to (c) The Ministry of Environment and Forests implements a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes for conservation of forests, wildlife and environment in the North Eastern States. The details of such schemes State-wise alongwith financial assistance provided and achievement made during the last three years are given at Annexure.

[See Appendix 179, Annexure No. 48]

Gauge conversion of Virudhnagar-Quilon railway line

2230. SHRI S. MUTHU MANI: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Railways have any plan to convert the Metre Gauge lines into Board Gauge from Virudhnagar to Quilon via Tenkasi and Shengottai as well as from Tirunelveli to Tiruchendur;

(b) whether any proposal has been received in this regard;

(c) whether the Railways have any plan to convert the Metre Gauge line into Board Gauge between Karur and Salem and Salem to Bangalore; and

(d) if so, the action taken by the Railways to convert the above said Metre Gauge lines into Board Gauge?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) and (b) A survey has been taken up. Further consideration of the project would be possible once the survey report becomes available.

(c) and (d) Salem to Bangalore has already been converted to Board Gauge. Karur and Salem are already connected by Broad Gauge *via* Erode.